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Thirtieth session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 785th MEETING

Held at the Palais Wilson, Geneva,
on Friday, 24 May 2002, at 3 p.m.

Chairperson: Mr. DOEK

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The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

CONSIDERATION OF REPORTS OF STATES PARTIES (agenda item 4) (continued)

Initial report of Niger (CRC/C/3/Add.29/Rev.1; CRC/C/Q/NIG/1; HRI/CORE/1/Add.45/Rev.1; written replies of the Government of Niger to the question in the list of issues (document without a symbol distributed in the meeting room in English only))

1. At the invitation of the Chairperson, the members of the delegation of Niger took places at the Committee table.

2. Mr. LAOUALI (Niger) said that his country relied largely on external resources to fund activities to promote and protect the rights of the child. At present, it was difficult to determine the exact source and amount of such funding; however the Ministry of Finance and Economy had undertaken to prepare a table that should clarify the matter, also indicating the percentage of the State budget devoted to such activities. It was hoped that the forthcoming adoption of a common system of budgetary nomenclature throughout the West African Economic and Monetary Union would also help to make the budgetary situation in Niger more transparent. The Government had identified children's health, education and protection as priority areas. However, despite meeting the requirements of the 20/20 Initiative, which called for the allocation of, on average, 20 per cent of the budget in developing countries to basic social services, there had been a reduction in allocations to those areas in recent years.

3. In cases of repudiation, which was more common than divorce, the situation of the child was precarious. Under Islamic law, the mother usually had the right of custody of her young children. However, cadis (Islamic judges) were increasingly taking into account the best interests of the child and sometimes granted custody to the father. Customary law did not provide for the allocation of a maintenance allowance to the parent who had custody of the children; such payments were often based on a mutual agreement between both parents. However, mothers frequently had difficulty in recovering a regular allowance from the father, and rarely took action to secure the payments. The Civil Code provided that when a family unit was broken up as a result of divorce, a judge ruled on the custody of the children. In such cases, the court would also normally order a parent with a regular income to pay a maintenance allowance.

4. The very strong social stigma attached to the status of unmarried mothers had, in the past, led to numerous cases of infanticide. However, the situation had improved since contraception had been liberalized. In 2000, approximately 14 per cent of women of reproductive age had been using either traditional or modern methods of contraception and a recent study had revealed that a third of women would use contraception if it was more widely available. The State had decided to charge a nominal fee for contraception. Abortion was still a punishable offence except in cases of rape or when the life of the mother or child was at risk. Most of the women

and girls who were serving a prison sentence for infanticide or abortion had committed the crime before contraception had been liberalized. The project Caritas-AMIN (Action for juveniles alone in Niger) provided those women and girls with support and the "Justice for Minors" programme had been introduced to provide them with assistance in leaving prison and to help them to reintegrate into society.

5. On the issue of children's participation, he said that traditionally, parents were responsible for making decisions on behalf of their children; fathers often considered that allowing children to express their views represented a negation of their authority. While it would take time to change such deep-rooted attitudes, measures had been adopted by the Government to raise awareness of the importance of allowing children to express their views.

6. Between 90 and 95 per cent of the population was Muslim; however, there was a strict separation between the State and religion.

7. Ms. BEBERT (Niger) said that the Ministry of Finance and Economy was responsible for coordinating the activities of non-governmental organizations (NGOs). In addition, an NGO network had been established in 2001 to coordinate work in the field of children's rights.

8. With regard to children born out of wedlock, she said it was usually the mother who became a victim and not the child. Children born out of wedlock were often accepted by other family members, but enjoyed no inheritance rights. Inheritance rights for women varied from one region to another; for example, in the north of the country where society was more matriarchal, women had more rights to land than in the south.

9. Mr. LAOUALI (Niger) said that in questions of inheritance, customary law normally prevailed. Neither modern law nor Islamic law specified that women could not inherit land. However, it was feared that if a widow remarried, the property that she had inherited from her first husband would be passed over to the new husband's family.

10. Ms. KHATTAB said the State party should indicate what measures were being taken to improve the situation of women and girls, who were deprived of their rights under customary law, Islamic law and statutory law.

11. Ms. TIGERSTEDT-TÄHTELÄ said the reporting State should provide more information about the disintegration of the family unit. Was it becoming more common for a man to repudiate his wife?

12. The CHAIRPERSON said the State party should indicate whether a child born out of wedlock was allowed to stay with his or her mother. If the mother was victimized, the child would inevitably suffer too.

13. Ms. AL-THANI said she was alarmed by the fact that whenever there was an incompatibility between customary law, statutory law and Muslim law, men chose to abide by the law that was most beneficial to them. The State party should indicate whether any measures

had been taken to introduce a uniform system of law based on the right of the individual; under the current system, women and children would continue to be disregarded. She expressed concern that women with gynaecological problems were often rejected by their husbands.

14. Mr. LAOUALI (Niger) said that the situation of women in his country was a matter of concern. It was true that the law was interpreted in a way that favoured men. Women generally suffered in silence, believing that they had no choice but to accept their lot. The Government had begun to take steps to raise awareness of women's rights, but much remained to be done.

15. Children were traditionally considered to be future providers for the older generation and the extended family typically played a significant role in the upbringing of each child. However, family unity was in jeopardy as a result of widespread poverty. Each family had, on average, seven children; parents were now finding it difficult to bring up their own children, and could no longer afford to help their relatives. Many children were left to fend for themselves and ended up living on the streets, unable to benefit from any sort of guidance.

16. Ms. BEBERT (Niger) said that only 45 per cent of births were registered. In some rural areas, the registration rate was as low as 15 per cent. To meet the shortage of principal registry centres, the State, with the support of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), had opened secondary registry centres in rural areas and had provided special training for the staff. It was now possible to register births in many maternity clinics. Representatives of the Government had visited rural areas to raise awareness of the importance of declaring births and traditional leaders had been encouraged to play a more active role in promoting birth registration. Replying to a question by Ms. Ouedraogo, she said that the Government had accorded particular attention to the areas in the north of the country that were home to nomadic populations. Measures had been taken to develop special schools for nomadic children and mobile health centres, where nomadic people could register births. Consequently, registration levels in the north of the country were relatively high.

17. Mr. LAOUALI (Niger), replying to a question by Ms. Khattab about home births, said it was regrettable that as few as 15 per cent of all births were assisted by a qualified health worker. Less than half of all pregnant women received prenatal care. The situation had not improved in recent years.

18. Ms. BEBERT (Niger), replying to a question on the "Fadas" youth clubs in Niger, said that they were local groups where young people could meet for discussions and to dance.

19. Mr. LAOUALI (Niger) explained that because the Government had done little, young people themselves had felt the need to create their own organizations. It was therefore necessary to assess existing structures; his Ministry and others were proposing to make the groups more dynamic and give them an official framework under which to operate.

20. Law 140 could be described as granting the right to popular criticism. People met in local groups to criticize the Government or to imitate politicians almost in the style of a review theatre. Although sometimes exaggerated, the practice offered a healthy framework for the public expression of criticism.

21. Ms. BEBERT (Niger) said that a great deal was being done to help disabled children in Niger and also to combat discrimination. A campaign had been under way since the beginning of 2002, coordinated by the Ministry of Education and two NGOs, to introduce integrated classes in schools, given that specialized schools for the blind and deaf existed in only three areas. NGOs were also working to assist children who had been victims of poliomyelitis, in particular by visiting schools and helping teachers to spot children with problems. A recent study by an NGO had resulted in a plan to assist other children, including the mentally disabled.

22. The National Committee was composed of representatives from a range of ministries; however, often they did not have the authority to approve funding or take the necessary decisions. For that reason and for lack of funds the Committee had been unable to draft a position paper on the rights of the child.

23. With regard to polygamy, she explained that it was a question of custom and religion in Niger. Although officially 96 per cent of the population were followers of Islam, probably only 20 per cent knew the Koran well; and the rest had little or no knowledge and relied on local elders to tell them what it said. They all knew that, according to the Koran, it was possible to have up to four wives, but they were not necessarily aware of the conditions which had to be fulfilled to do so. If a family code existed in Niger it would perhaps be possible to improve the protection of children in polygamous families.

24. In reply to a question on adoption, she said that in 1997 the Ministry of Social Development, Population, Women's Promotion and Child Protection had signed an agreement with a French association authorizing the international adoption of children from Niger. Most adoption was international rather than national. Children born out of wedlock were usually looked after by the woman's family. There were also cases of infanticide resulting from pregnancy outside marriage, where instead of giving the child up to an adoption centre a mother would abandon it.

25. Mr. LAOUALI (Niger) said that although there were sometimes difficulties the best option for a child born out of wedlock was to remain with the woman's family to avoid any stigma and that the practice was encouraged.

26. Ms. KARP asked whether there was a women's movement to prohibit polygamy and whether studies had been carried out on its influence on children.

27. Mr. LAOUALI (Niger) said that no special studies had been made and that women had not officially objected to polygamy so far, although some indirect negative effects had been noted. He believed that the only way to tackle the issue in Niger was to have a proper family code because it was only by making people aware of all the responsibilities associated with polygamy that they would eventually desist and revert to monogamy.

28. Ms. OUEDRAOGO asked whether religious leaders could help reverse the trend of polygamy by making men more aware of the obligations involved.

29. Mr. LAOUALI (Niger) said that that would not support the Government's cause because often the leaders themselves had four wives. There were other issues on which the religious leaders could provide more support, such as school attendance by girls and efforts to combat the HIV/AIDS pandemic.

30. Ms. OUEDRAOGO said that in other countries polygamy was still practised despite the existence of a family code in which it was prohibited. In addition, the code would be discussed and adopted by men who were in the majority in positions of authority. It was therefore necessary for more women to become involved in order to reverse the trend.

31. Ms. BEBERT (Niger) said that polygamy would persist in Niger because there was a powerful association of Muslim women which favoured it. One possible option was to allow only those with the necessary resources to take more than one wife, as stated in the Koran. However, it would take a long time to abolish polygamy completely.

32. The CHAIRPERSON suggested that in a country where children born outside wedlock were discriminated against, polygamy could possibly be seen as positive.

33. Ms. BEBERT (Niger) said that national adoption was not widespread as it was still a delicate issue in the country. Children were often taken in by relatives, in which case there was no need for them to be officially adopted. However, children abandoned in reception centres were put up for international adoption. Since the agreement signed with the French adoption association, about 10-12 children per year had been adopted. The association monitored the children and sent regular reports on their progress. There was only one State reception centre for abandoned children.

34. Ms. KHATTAB asked whether when adopted, children took the name of the person who had adopted them, pointing out that according to Islam every child had the right to know who his or her biological parents were.

35. Ms. OUEDRAOGO pointed out that Niger had not ratified the Hague Convention on Protection of Children and Co-operation in respect of Intercountry Adoption; given the large number of international adoptions resulting from the agreement with the French association, she wondered whether it planned to do so. She also asked whether follow-up on adoption was conducted in accordance with the provisions of the Hague Convention.

36. Ms. KARP expressed concern that informal adoption did not provide for monitoring of the treatment of children in families.

37. Ms. BEBERT (Niger) said that if a child was born outside of wedlock the mother usually gave it her name. When adopted by a childless family, a child usually kept his or her original name. Niger intended to ratify the Hague Convention, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs had been advised of the fact. The monitoring process for formal adoption was fully compliant with the provisions of the Hague Convention. Efforts were made to ensure that the child was well integrated into the adoptive family through follow-up visits and interviews. However, there was

no follow-up procedure for informal adoption because it usually took place within families. She acknowledged that there were instances of exploitation and the child's family sometimes complained and/or withdrew the child. However, unless an official complaint was lodged, the State did not intervene.

38. With regard to the respect for children's views, a decree enacted in 1991 stated that a judge must take into account a complaint lodged by a minor during the legal process.

39. Replying to a question on sexual abuse of children, she said that rape was severely punished under the Criminal Code of Niger. Between the end of 2000 and March 2001 there had been an increase in the rape of young girls, and instructions had been given to the leaders of local communities to increase their vigilance in the hope of eradicating the crime. Research had been done to establish the reasons for the increase. Two possible explanations were the belief that sex with young girls provided protection against AIDS and the proliferation of "video clubs" in private homes, which often showed pornographic films that might be influencing behaviour. Niger had attended the Second World Congress against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children in Yokohama and as a follow-up, an action plan had been implemented to counteract the phenomenon.

40. Ms. KARP asked whether legislation existed against pornography. She also wondered why, under Niger's laws, children were given special protection against sexual abuse only up to the age of 13 and otherwise only in cases of rape.

41. Mr. LAOUALI said that the Criminal Code contained provisions prohibiting pornography, although they were not explicit. The Criminal Code was not as far-reaching as suggested in the Stockholm Declaration, and although a certain number of issues had been tackled much remained to be done in order to implement the Declaration. It was true that children under 13 were better protected than older children and that sexual relations by children between the ages of 13 and 18 could be taken as consensual. His Government was aware of that inconsistency and the committee reforming the text of the law had raised the issue.

42. Ms. TIGERSTEDT-TÄHTELÄ asked whether the year 2000 had seen any improvement in the 1997 poverty strategy supported by the World Bank, given that there were still food shortages and a high incidence of malnutrition.

43. Mr. LAOUALI (Niger) said that the report seemed to contain an error in terminology, leading to some confusion between the anti-poverty framework programme and the Poverty Reduction Strategy (SRP). The framework programme had been introduced in certain areas as a pilot project, and focused on the improvement of women's status, although the intention at the outset had not been a gender approach. The Strategy (SRP) encompassed all other priority areas, such as health, education, good governance and food security. It was too early to provide an appraisal, but he wished to mention that, since the concerns of gender issues and the rights of the child had not been separately reflected, his Ministry had requested that they should be highlighted.

44. Ms. BEBERT (Niger) said that only during the current year had teachers and counsellors been made available in the campaign to combat HIV/AIDS, but NGOs played a large part in organizing awareness programmes for schools. Replying to another question, she said a law to promote decentralization had recently been promulgated.

45. Since, as mentioned in paragraph 28 of the report, the lack of school infrastructure seriously undermined the obligation for children to attend school between the ages of 4 and 16 years, private schools played a large part in education. Such schools charged fees. Some of them offered special conditions, but the number of places was limited.

46. The Children's Parliament had been mentioned in connection with children's participation in national life; each region was entitled to four seats, and sent two boys and two girls. In addition, the Ministry of Social Development, as well as NGOs and other bodies, encouraged the establishment of youth councils, with a view to instilling in parents the recognition that children should share in decision-taking. Under UNICEF auspices, two children from Niger had attended the recent Youth Forum in New York. In addition, within the scope of the World Youth Movement, children took a so-called Caravan of Hope to rural areas, and they themselves organized cultural events and gave talks to promote aims such as schooling for girls and adults' acceptance of children's participation.

47. Ms. OUEDRAOGO said it seemed that, in spite of the Government's efforts, maternal and child mortality remained high and obstetric services were extremely inadequate. The ratio of professional medical staff to the population was in general very low. She wondered what progress was being made in implementing the Plan of Action 2001-2010, which inter alia aimed at reducing child maternity by 50 per cent, and in addressing the problem of inadequate funds and personnel. She also asked about steps to combat malnutrition, including measures to implement the International Code of Marketing of Breast-milk Substitutes that Niger had adopted. She would also be grateful to know what was being done to discourage traditional practices such as excision and scarring. It seemed that the HIV/AIDS infection rate was growing and that the national programme to combat the pandemic was hampered by a crucial lack of funds. She would nevertheless appreciate information on the campaign, particularly about efforts made to increase awareness among young people.

48. She found it disquieting that, according to paragraph 278 of the report, there was no organization act regulating pre-school education, and would welcome an explanation, as well as more information concerning experimental schools, which likewise seemed not to be governed by any special text. She also wondered what stage had been reached in integrating the Koranic schools into the formal education system, and requested clarification about specialized education for children.

49. Although slavery was not widespread in the country, she asked what efforts the Government was making, including any cooperation with relevant NGOs, to eradicate it. Lastly, she asked what was being done to deal with the problems of beggars and child drug victims.

50. Mr. AL-SHEDDI said he was concerned to know whether there had been a campaign or other measure to combat the country's high illiteracy rate, to which so many other problems were related. Expenditure on education, already low, seemed to be growing less, and he asked

whether the Government was giving any attention to increasing it. Koranic schools were a sound institution, and they accounted for roughly half of the country's under-twelve school enrolment. He was aware of cooperation between the Government and the Islamic Bank with regard to such schools, including measures aimed at enhancing the curriculum; he would appreciate further information in that regard, as well as details about the types of private school available. With regard to government cooperation with international bodies he wondered, in general, whether education received priority.

51. Ms. CHUTIKUL, referring to the question of child labour, said that, ideally, the provisions of the ILO Minimum Age Convention, 1973 (No. 138) should be observed, although in practice they would be difficult to monitor. She wondered, therefore, whether the Ministries of Labour and Education could work to develop an alternative system of non-formal education, perhaps spanning fewer years than the normal curriculum and concentrating on a few basic subjects; NGOs and perhaps ILO could be invited to help.

52. Since the delegation had said that no official figures were available on trafficking in children, she wished to know what efforts were being made to investigate the problem, since Niger had attended the Second World Congress against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children. Perhaps a plan of action, possibly with the help of NGOs and UNICEF, could be established for the purpose.

53. Ms. AL-THANI noted that special schools were available for blind and deaf children. Since, according to the information provided, some 15.5 per cent of disabled children attended regular schools, there seemed to be a disquieting gap. She wondered whether there were any plans to promote the integration of disabled children into regular classes and to establish special schools for disabled children other than those who were blind and deaf.

54. She noted that the vast majority of childbirths took place in the home, with no professional medical assistance. The best approach to the problem, in her view, would be midwifery training for local women; she asked whether there were any plans in that regard. She also asked what was being done to combat harmful practices such as the removal of the uvula at birth. Noting the poor progress of immunization, except in the case of polio vaccine, she wondered whether the difference stemmed from the fact that polio vaccine was taken orally, not injected, although it was made available at the same time as other vaccination; she would appreciate an explanation. The persistently high rate of maternal and child mortality was disquieting; more information about the national plan of action to combat child diseases and sexually transmitted diseases would be welcome.

55. Ms. KHATTAB agreed that the figures for maternal and child mortality, and for HIV/AIDS, were high, and wondered whether the reporting might be inaccurate.

56. Clear guidelines were needed in the efforts to reduce discrimination against women and children, especially in view of the evident instances of side-stepping the issue, such as the invoking of customary laws or the tenets of Islam. One such instance was an alleged movement of Muslim women to advocate polygamy; she wondered who was behind it.

57. The child labour situation warranted clarification, especially because of the discrepancy between the minimum age of employment and the age when basic education could end. A database was required. The aim should be to improve care in the short term and, in the long term, abolish child labour, beginning with the worst forms. She joined other members in urging Niger to ratify the ILO Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999 (No. 182). She also felt that the teaching of religion in ordinary schools called for appropriate teacher training. Referring to paragraph 169 of the report, she asked whether Niger upheld the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, article 5 of which prohibited pronouncement of the death sentence for crimes committed by children.

58. Mr. CITARELLA said he was concerned by the extreme poverty in Niger and the associated lack of adequate health services and staff. He wondered whether basic health care was provided free to all citizens, especially mothers and children. He noted from paragraph 28 of the report that school attendance was compulsory for children aged 4 to 16. He wondered, however, what the age spread was with regard to free compulsory education because there seemed to be a gap between the ages of 4 and 7, since there was no free pre-school education, and another gap between 14 and 16 years, since children could start work at the age of 14 years.

59. Ms. KARP asked whether there was any timetable for reform of the juvenile justice system. Juvenile courts had been instituted some time ago but had never been established for lack of resources. In general, she was amazed at the low numbers of children in prison, but if the rights of even a small number were violated, it was important to correct the situation.

The meeting was suspended at 5.10 p.m. and resumed at 5.25 p.m.

60. Mr. LAOUALI (Niger), replying to a question on juvenile justice, said that no schedule had been established for completion of the reform. That was not a satisfactory situation, but there had been some improvement since 1999 and it might be possible to complete the programme within two years, although that was a highly indicative figure.

61. State education at the primary and secondary levels was free of charge. Students paid only for their equipment. Free university education was also being introduced. The problem was that, as demand far outstripped supply, not all children managed to find a place in school.

62. The health situation was indeed worrying, but Niger had a 10-year health plan and, unlike other sectors where recruitment and pay increases had been restricted, the health sector continued to recruit some 500 new staff each year. Health facilities were accessible, but it was difficult for those who lived more than 5 kilometres from the nearest centre. Health care was not free of charge: the State had for some time promoted generic medicaments, and, in accordance with the Bamako Initiative, a small charge for treatment was levied. If a centre could not treat a patient, or if the patient preferred, it was possible to attend another centre and pay more.

63. There were no statistics on the application of the death penalty to children. The age of criminal responsibility was 16 and between the ages of 16 and 18 the legal punishment was halved. Alternatives to prison were being tried out in order to avoid children being placed in proximity with convicted criminals.

64. HIV/AIDS rates in Niger were relatively low, although since there were insufficient resources for detection they probably represented the tip of the iceberg. A third-generation strategic plan was in place involving not just the Ministry of Health but all technical ministries, since AIDS was seen as a social and not merely a medical issue. It differed from the two previous plans in that it was headed by the President of the Republic and financing was assured through various partners including the World Bank. The Ministry of Social Development would shortly be approving a five-year support programme targeting AIDS orphans in particular.

65. Some progress had been made in treating young drug addicts and suppressing drug trafficking under a subregional plan involving social and other ministries. Since 90 per cent of the funding had come from external sources, however, the plan had stalled when difficulties had arisen in relations with donors and financial institutions, 18 months previously. It had only recently resumed.

66. A programme was under way to modernize the Koranic schools, with the help of the Islamic Development Bank (IDB) and UNICEF. The aim was threefold: to enable Koranic schools to contribute to literacy campaigns; to resolve the problem of children coming to urban Koranic schools from the countryside with no means of subsistence and ending up begging on the streets; and to help the schools move from a rote-learning system to a curriculum that would enable children to learn a trade.

67. Ms. BEBERT (Niger) said a programme financed by the World Bank and other partners was under way to reduce infant mortality by 50 per cent by combating malaria, diarrhoea and acute respiratory infections.

68. With regard to malnutrition resulting from food taboos, she said a number of NGOs were working to increase awareness of the issue and also, in remote rural areas, to provide people with the food their children needed. Similar efforts were being made to curb harmful traditional practices, including removal of the uvula. Traditionally, the majority of children had their uvula removed and it was hard to persuade families that no harm would come to children if it was not removed. People were beginning to realize that those who had not had it done had not suffered harm, but time was needed to deal with the issue.

69. There was one centre for specialized education, in central Niger. Previously under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Justice, since it catered for children in conflict with the law, it had been transferred under the 1998 Education Act to the Ministry of Education. It was currently attended by about 20 children. Pre-school education was governed by the same Act, as were experimental schools, where teaching was carried out in the national languages.

70. Mr. LAOUALI (Niger) said it was true that, at the time the report had been written, there had been no law on education, but that deficiency had been rectified by the Education Act and its regulations.

71. The experimental schools had been instituted with the help of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), inter alia. The idea had been to

evaluate them and then either abandon the experiment or institutionalize the schools. There was now pressure on the Government to make a choice. The advantages of mother-tongue education were clear: children who received such education learned more easily.

72. Slavery was a diffuse and insidious phenomenon that was not susceptible to investigation by survey and would require a very long time to quantify thoroughly. One NGO, Timidria, was very active in the area, but the Government itself had not been idle: slavery was now condemned and all complaints were investigated. In addition, the National Committee on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms had embarked upon a study, due to be completed by the end of 2002, with a view to reinforcing the relevant legislation.

73. The private sector was involved at all levels of education, and received State support on a quarterly basis, depending on the number of students enrolled and the number of teachers in post. All the land used for educational facilities was provided by the State.

74. Niger had ratified the ILO Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999 (No. 182) and the Ministry of Social Development and the Civil Service, Labour and Employment Ministry were tasked with combating child labour, in cooperation with the International Programme for the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC) and UNICEF. The aim was to report incidents and rehabilitate children depending on their situation: those too old for school were placed in apprenticeships; those too young to work were returned to school, following appropriate rehabilitation, while others were provided with vocational training and assistance in setting up in a trade.

75. With regard to trafficking in children, he said the Ministry of the Interior had recently met with other Council of the Entente States to attempt to reach agreement on an international travel document for children. If children without such a travel document attempted to cross a border, the States would cooperate to return them to their parents; similarly, if no bona fide relationship could be established between an accompanied child and the person accompanying him or her, both individuals would be returned to their country of origin until the reason for travel could be duly certified.

76. The reason why the polio vaccination programme had been so successful was not simply that people preferred drops to injections. It was also due to the efforts of a coalition of partners that had concentrated on door-to-door visits and had followed nomadic groups in their travels.

77. Ms. BEBERT (Niger) said that one reason for the increase in the numbers of beggar children, despite the legal prohibition, was that marabouts frequently took children from villages as assistants and to teach them the Koran, only to abandon them later. More educated marabouts were being recruited to help in awareness-raising campaigns.

78. The Government had been active in promoting adult literacy and the literacy rate for women now stood at 20 per cent. Women's groups had been established either by the Ministry of Social Development or by civil society and received training in order to manage their own budgets. Literacy programmes for men were also under way.

79. Ms. OUEDRAOGO thanked the members of the delegation of Niger for their frank and open dialogue with the Committee. She encouraged Niger to continue its efforts despite lack of resources: much depended also on political will. She suggested that additional information might have been submitted, given the many initiatives undertaken since submission of the original report.

80. Mr. LAOUALI (Niger) said his delegation was very satisfied with the exchange and extended warm thanks to the Committee for its comments and suggestions. He agreed that resources were not all, and hoped that, given the political will, the Committee would find many of the issues resolved when it came to consider Niger's next report.

The meeting rose at 6.05 p.m.